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MARGARET FULLER'S TRANSLATION AND CRITICISM OF GOETHE'S *TASSO*.

Few persons in America knew much of Goethe during the third and fourth decades of the last century, and a part of these—among them some of our most prominent writers—were awhile bitterly opposed to him. Goethe was accused of being irreligious and rather loose in his morals. None of the French writers, though introduced much earlier into this country, when the religious rigor was even stronger, ever suffered to such an extent from being misunderstood and misinterpreted. It is an interesting study to observe how Goethe gradually grew in the estimation of our best thinkers during this period, until they accorded him the place he now occupies among the world's greatest poets.

One of the first advocates of Goethe, and doubtless the strongest and most influential among them during this time, was Margaret Fuller. Few had ever understood Goethe as well or profited so much by a thorough and sympathetic study of his works as she. As a prominent member in a literary circle of young men and women with open minds, as editor of the *Dial* and leader in the "Conversations" which she held in Boston for five years she had ample opportunity to impress her thoughts of Goethe upon those who, along with her, were then the leaders of thought in New England. Her articles on Goethe and his works in the *Dial* (Boston, 1842), though tinged here and there by the rigorous spirit of the time and place, are certainly among the most carefully studied and appreciative criticisms written of him.

Only two years after Margaret Fuller commenced the study of German she began to translate for her friends and for publication, certain works from the original. From Goethe she translated *Tasso*, the first two volumes of Eckermann's *Conversations with Goethe* and a number of short poems, besides a considerable number of pages of quotations from other works, which she used in her criticisms.¹ The most important of these is her translation of *Tasso*. According to

¹ For a discussion of a number of the translations mentioned above, see Braun, *Margaret Fuller and Goethe*, New York, 1910, pp. 216-241.

a letter written to F. H. Hedge in November 1834, in which she expressed the hope that Hedge and Emerson would look over and help correct her manuscript, she must have translated this work the same year. (Higginson, *Margaret Fuller Ossoli*, Boston, 1884, p. 63). She failed, however, to find a publisher and it did not appear in print until 1860, when her brother Arthur B. Fuller included it, after her death, in a volume of her works entitled *Art, Literature and the Drama*, with a number of other papers by Margaret Fuller previously published (1846) under the title *Papers on Literature and Art*.

With what feelings Margaret Fuller translated this work is shown by a passage from her *Memoirs* (Vol. II, p. 105) "Beethoven! Tasso! It is well to think of you! What sufferings from baseness, from coldness! How rare and momentary were the flashes of joy, of confidence and tenderness in these noblest lives!"

That Margaret Fuller understood the deep significance of the play in relation to Goethe's life is certain. It is a portrayal of Goethe's own moods and innermost feelings, "for the poet is the only priest in the secrets of the heart." (*Dial*, Jan. 1842) "To me give a God to tell what I suffer" applies, she believed, as truly to Goethe's sufferings as to Tasso's into whose mouth he put these words. "You say there is no likeness between Goethe and Tasso. Never believe it; such pictures are not painted from observation merely. That deep coloring which fills them with light and life is given by dipping the brush in one's own life-blood." "The best criticism for the hearing of those that will hear is one of those matchless scenes in which Goethe represents the sudden breezes of eloquence, the fitful shadings of mood, and the exquisite sensitiveness to all influences that made the weakness and power of Tasso." (*Dial*, Boston, Jan. 1842, and *Life Without and Life Within*, Boston, 1859, pp. 28 f.)

"The central situation of Tasso," she notes in the introduction to her translation, "the manner in which his companions draw him out, and are in turn drawn out by him, the mingled generosity and worldliness of the realist Antonio, the mixture of taste, feeling, and unconscious selfishness in

Alphonso, the more delicate but not less decided painting of the two Leonoras, the gradual but irresistible force by which the catastrophe is drawn down upon us, concur to make this drama a model of art, that art which Goethe worshipped ever after he had exhaled his mental boyhood in *Werther* It is, I believe, a novelty to see the mind of a poet analyzed and portrayed by another, who however, shared the inspiration only of his subject, saved from his weakness by that superb balance of character in which Goethe surpasses even Milton." (*Art, Literature and the Drama*—Boston, 1860, p. 356.)

"Goethe has described the position of the poetical mind in its prose relations We see what he felt must be the result of entire abandonment to the highest nature. We see why he valued himself on being able to understand the Alphonso's, and meet as an equal the Antonios of everyday life Goethe had not from nature that character of self-reliance and self-control in which he so long appeared to the world. It was wholly acquired and so highly valued because he was conscious of the opposite tendency. He was by nature as impetuous, though not as tender as Tasso, and the disadvantage at which this constantly placed him was keenly felt by a mind made to appreciate the subtlest harmonies in all relations. Therefore was it that when he at last cast anchor, he was so reluctant again to trust himself to wave and breeze." (*Life Without and Life Within*, Boston, 1859, pp. 28 f.)

In presenting her translation of this "very celebrated production of the first German writer," Margaret Fuller discusses and compares the two languages in question. With a fine perception and feeling for the distinction between them she writes of the high degree of perfection and the condensed power of expression attained by the German language, due to "the rapid growth of German literature and the concurrence of so many master spirits, all at once fashioning the language into a medium for the communication of their thoughts."

In the same connection she frankly calls attention to

the difficulties that may, as a result, beset any translator in rendering German verse into English. "There are difficulties attending the translation of German works into English which might baffle one much more skillful in the use of the latter than myself. A great variety of compound words enable the German writer to give a degree of precision and delicacy of shading to his expressions nearly impracticable with the terse, the dignified, but by no means flexible English idiom." (*Art, Literature and the Drama*, p. 355)

Margaret Fuller, however, "deemed," as Coleridge did in his translation of Schiller's *Wallenstein*, "the rendering of the spirit, on the whole more desirable than that of the letter." "The exact transmission of thought" seemed to her, the one important thing in a translation; "if grace and purity of style come of themselves," she writes, "it is so much gained. In translating I throw myself as entirely as possible into the mood of the writer, and make use of such expressions as would come naturally, if reading the work aloud in English. The style thus formed is at least a transcript of the feelings excited by the original." (Preface to translation of the *Correspondence of Fräulein Günderode and Bettine von Arnim*, Boston, 1861, p. VI.)

This rendering of the spirit rather than of the letter is the chief characteristic we feel in reading Margaret Fuller's translation. It has some of the merits of original composition, in fact, it reads like a piece of first hand work. The soliloquy of *Tasso* in scene 2 of Act II is an illustration.

Is it permitted thee to ope thine eyes
And look around—above thee? Did these pillars
Hear what she spake? They were the witnesses
How a descending goddess lifted me
Into a new, incomparable day.
What power, what wealth lie in this new traced circle!
My happiness outruns my wildest dream!
Let those born blind think what they will of colors,
To the cleared eye wakens a novel sense.
What courage, what presentiment! Drunk with joy,
I scarce can tread the indicated path,
And how shall I deserve the choicest gifts
Of earth and heaven? Patience, self-denial,

Must give me claim to confidence—they shall.
 O how did I deserve that she should choose me!
 What shall I do to justify her choice?
 Yet that choice speaks my worth. Yes, I am worthy,
 Since she could think me so. My soul is consecrate,
 My princess, to thy words, thy looks. Whate'er
 Thou wilt, ask of thy slave. In distant lands
 I'll seek renown with peril of my life,
 Or chant in every grove, thy charms and virtues.
 Wholly possess the creature thou hast formed;
 Each treasure of my soul is thine. I ne'er can
 Express my vast devotion with the pen
 In written words. Oh, could I but assist
 The poet's by the painter's art! Did honey
 Fall from my lips! Now never more shall I
 Be lonely, sad, or weak. Thou wilt be with me.
 Had I a squadron of the noblest men
 To help me do thy bidding, some great deed
 Should justify the boldness of a tongue
 Which dared to ask her grace! I meant it not—
 I meant not to speak now. But it is well;
 I take as a free gift what I could never
 Have claimed. This glorious future! This new youth!
 Rise heart! O, tree of love! may genial showers
 Call out a thousand branches towards heaven!
 Unfold thy blossoms, swell thy golden fruit
 Until the loved one's hand be stretched to cull it.

(*Art, Literature and the Drama*, pp. 387 f.)

If judged alone by Margaret Fuller's standard we must admit that the spirit is indeed well rendered. If judged, however, as a faithful rendition of the letter and meter, as well as of the spirit—the criterion by which any translation is sure to be judged finally—Margaret Fuller's exercise of too much freedom, or of her limitations, are at once evident. To arrive at a fair estimate of her translation in this stricter sense two representative passages have been chosen for comparison, the one subdued and descriptive, the other impassioned. Both are from the dialogue between Tasso and the princess in scene 4, Act V.

TASSO

Du warnest recht, ich hab' es schon bedacht. (3140)
 Verkleidet geh' ich hin, den armen Rock

Des Pilgers oder Schäfers zieh' ich an.
Ich schleiche durch die Stadt, wo die Bewegung
Der Tausende den einen leicht verbirgt.
Ich eile nach dem Ufer, finde dort (3145)

Gleich einen Kahn mit willig guten Leuten,
Mit Bauern, die zum Markte kamen, nun
Nach Hause kehren, Leute von Sorrent;
Denn ich muss nach Sorrent hinüber eilen.
Dort wohnt meine Schwester, die mit mir (3150)
Die Schmerzensfreude meiner Eltern war.

Im Schiffe bin ich still, und trete dann
Auch schweigend an das Land, ich gehe sacht
Den Pfad hinauf, und an dem Thore frag' ich
Wo wohnt Cornelia? Zeigt mir es an! (3155)

Cornelia Sersale? Freundlich deutet
Mir eine Spinnerin die Strasse, sie
Bezeichnet mir das Haus, So steig ich weiter.
Die Kinder laufen nebenher und schauen
Das wilde Haar, den düstern Fremdling an. (3160)
So komm' ich an die Schwelle. Offen steht
Die Thüre schon, so tret' ich in das Haus—

I go disguised.

In the poor garb of shepherd or of pilgrim,
I easily shall thread the crowded streets
Of Naples unobserved. I seek the shore;
Then find a boat, manned by good, honest peasants,
Returning from the market to Sorrentium,
Where dwells my sister, who with me formed once
The painful joy of our lost parents. I speak not
While in the skiff, nor yet at disembarking;
I softly climb the path, and at the gate
I ask, "Where dwells Cornelia?" and a woman,
Spinning before her door, shows me her house.
The children flock to look upon the stranger,
With the disheveled locks and gloomy looks.
At last I reach the threshold—open stands
The door—I enter.

PRINCESS

Gar wenig ist's was wir von dir verlangen;
Und dennoch scheint es allzu viel zu sein. (3235)

Du sollst dich selbst uns freundlich überlassen.
Wir wollen nichts von dir, was du nicht bist,
Wenn du nur erst dir mit dir selbst gefällst.
Du machst uns Freude, wenn du Freude hast,
Und du betrübst uns nur, wenn du sie fliehst; (3240)

Und wenn du uns auch ungeduldig machst,
 So ist es nur, dass wir dir helfen möchten
 Und, leider! sehn, dass nicht zu helfen ist,
 Wenn du nicht selbst des Freundes Hand ergreifst,
 Die, sehnlich ausgestreckt, dich nicht erreicht. (3245)

We ask but little from thee; yet that little
 Has ever been too much: that thou wouldst trust us,
 And to thyself be true! Couldst thou do this
 Thou wouldst be happy, and we be happy in thee.
 We must be gloomy when we see thee so;
 Impatient when so oft we see thee need
 The help we cannot give; when thou refusest
 To seize the hand stretched out to thee in love.

Tasso

Du bist es selbst, wie du zum erstenmal,
 Ein heil'ger Engel, mir entgegen kamst!
 Verzeih' dem trüben Blick des Sterblichen,
 Wenn er auf Augenblicke dich verkannt.
 Er kennt dich wieder! Ganz eröffnet sich (3250)

Die Seele, nur dich ewig zu verehren,
 Es füllt sich ganz das Herz von Zärtlichkeit—
 Sie ist's, sie steht vor mir. Welch ein Gefühl!
 Ist es Verwirrung, was mich nach dir zieht?
 Ist's Raserei? Ist's ein erhöhter Sinn, (3255)

Der erst die höchste, reinste Wahrheit fasst?
 Ja, es ist das Gefühl, das mich allein
 Auf dieser Erde glücklich machen kann,
 Das mich allein so elend werden liess,
 Wenn ich ihm widerstand und aus dem Herzen (3260)
 Es bannen wollte. Diese Leidenschaft
 Gedacht' ich zu bekämpfen, stritt und stritt
 Mit meinem tiefsten Sein, zerstörte frech
 Mein eignes Selbst, dem du so ganz gehörst—

Thou art the same who came to meet me first!
 Angel of pity and of love, forgive
 That my eye, clouded by the mists of earth,
 Mistook thee for a moment. Now I know thee,
 And open all my soul to adoration,
 My heart to tenderness beyond all words.
 Ah, what a feeling! What a strange confusion!
 Is't madness which draws me thus towards thee?
 Or is't an elevated sense of truth,
 In its most lovely, earth-born form? I know not.
 It is the feeling which alone can make me

Most blest if I may venture to indulge it,
Most miserable if I must repress it.
And I have striven with this passion—striven
With my profoundest self—have torn in pieces
The heart which beat with such devotion for thee.

PRINCESS

Wenn ich dich, Tasso, länger hören soll, (3265)
So mässige die Glut, die mich erschreckt.
If thou wouldst have me listen longer, Tasso,
Avoid expressions which I must not hear.

TASSO

Beschränkt der Rand des Bechers einen Wein,
Der schäumend wallt und brausend überschwillt?
Mit jedem Wort erhöhst du mein Glück,
Mit jedem Worte glänzt dein Auge heller. (3270)
Ich fühle mich im Innersten verändert,
Ich fühle mich von aller Not entladen,
Frei wie ein Gott, und alles dank' ich dir!
Unsägliche Gewalt, die mich beherrscht,
Entfliesset deinen Lippen; ja, du machst (3275)
Mich ganz dir eigen. Nichts gehöret mehr
Von meinem ganzen Ich mir künftig an.
Es trübt mein Auge sich in Glück und Licht,
Es schwankt mein Sinn. Mich hält der Fuss nicht mehr.
Unwiderstehlich ziehst du mich zu dir, (3280)
Und unaufhaltsam dringt mein Herz dir zu.
Du hast mich ganz auf ewig dir gewonnen,
So nimm denn auch mein ganzes Wesen hin!

And can the goblet's rim restrain the wine
Which foams above it? Every word of thine
Kindles my soul with fires unfelt before;
With each word beam thine eyes more clear and soft;
My soul dilates, each sorrow flies, I'm free,—
Free as a god,—and this I own to thee.
The power that fills me now thy lips have poured on me,
And I am wholly thine. Of all my being
No atom call I mine, apart from thee.
Ah I am blinded with excess of light!
My senses waver with excess of bliss!
I must approach. My heart throbs wildly towards thee;
I am all thine—receive me to thyself!

Again, as before, the spirit of Goethe's version is well preserved in the passages quoted. It is a "faithful transcript

of the feelings excited by the original" but, as Margaret Fuller herself confesses, the beautiful finish of Goethe's style is lost. (*Art, Literature and the Drama*, p. 356.) The meter is not smooth, nor does one have to look far in her translation to find shortened or lengthened lines.

In the passages quoted above seventy-three lines of the original have been rendered by fifty-four, and in the whole play Goethe's 3453 lines have been translated by 2600. This reduction, as Margaret Fuller said, is partly due to the fact that English words are, as a rule, shorter than German words. A good example of this contraction is found in the translation of lines 3246-47, where one and one half lines, "Du bist es selbst, wie du zum erstenmal, . . . mir entgegen kamst", are translated by one line, "Thou art the same who came to meet me first." In the same manner the two lines, "Ich fühle mich im Innersten verändert, ich fühle mich von aller Not entladen" 3271 f. are somewhat freely translated by part of one line, "my soul dilates, each sorrow flies." Added to this is the fact that the inflectional endings of the German in the hands of a skillful writer help very materially in filling up the line and smoothing out the meter.

In the present instance, however, as we shall see, the chief factor in this decrease is Margaret Fuller's omission of many of the minor details. A part of these she doubtless left out—as she often left out parts in her translations of German prose works—because she thought they added little to the development of the plot or thought, or to the interest of the reader.² Granting that many of these passages could be spared without seriously injuring the play, it must be admitted, however, that it is often just these little details, frequently left out by her, that lend picturesqueness and action to the narrative.

But not all of the omissions and changes made by the translator were deliberate. Margaret Fuller's abilities to translate some of the German phrases which she encountered into the "by no means flexible English idiom" were at times severely taxed. This she herself confesses in her introduction, already

² For examples of omissions in her prose works see her translations of Eckermann's *Conversations with Goethe*—The whole discussion of the *Farbenlehre*, wherever mentioned, is left out.

quoted, and the fact is all the clearer when we examine her translation more carefully.

Though a large majority of her lines are very fair translations in the stricter sense, especially those found in the first passage compared, yet the cases of a too free, often faulty translation, of omitted lines and insertions are common. The following are representative illustrations, as found throughout the entire work. In the original, line 3140, the sentence "Du warnest recht, ich hab' es schon bedacht" is omitted in the translation altogether, so is line 3149, "Denn ich muss nach Sorrent hinüber eilen." In lines 3155-3158 "Zeigt mir es an;" "Freundlich deutet mir sie

die Strasse;" "So steig ich weiter," are all left out, as is also line 3237, "Wir wollen nichts von dir, was du nicht bist." In the six lines 3238-43, the wish that Tasso were only satisfied with himself (and his accomplishments) is translated by the request that he be true to himself. The thought "You cause us joy when you are joyful" is translated by "Couldst thou do this thou wouldst be happy and we be happy in thee," and "even if you make us impatient, we are so only because etc.," by "we must be impatient when etc." "Sehnlich" (3245) is translated by "in love." "Sie ist's, sie steht vor mir" (3253) is omitted. "Der erst die höchste, reinste Wahrheit fasst" (3256) is at most only partially translated by "in its most lovely earthborn form." "If I may venture to indulge it" is inserted after 3258. "So mässige die Glut, die mich erschreckt" (3266) is weakly rendered by "Avoid expressions which I must not hear." "With excess of bliss" is inserted after "es schwankt mein Sinn." (3279). "Mich hält der Fuss nicht mehr. Unwiderstehlich ziehst du mich zu dir" (3279-80) is translated by simply "I must approach;" and "Du hast mich ganz auf ewig dir gewonnen, so nimm denn auch mein ganzes Wesen hin." (3282-83) by the single line "I am all thine—receive me to thyself."

A large number of the changes noted are due, of course, to Margaret Fuller's custom of translating the general idea only. The omission of many of the minor details naturally follows. But often the changes are very clearly due to real

difficulties in translating. It is interesting to note some of those which Margaret Fuller complained of in her introduction, quoted above, namely, those due to the difficulty of translating compound words from the German. Of the twenty-seven or more occurring in the passage quoted she successfully translates, directly or indirectly, at least twenty. Two or three others occur in expressions altogether omitted. "Verändert" (3271) and "entladen" (3272) are translated very freely, while such words as "unsäglich" (3274), "unwiderstehlich" (3280) and "unaufhaltsam" (3281) were real obstacles, though such compounds as "Schmerzenfreude" (31-51), "verehhren" (3251) and "widerstand" (3260) are translated successfully.

Nor can the translator easily rid herself of an objectionable phrase. "It is more difficult to polish a translation," Margaret Fuller writes, "than an original work, since we are denied the liberty of retrenching or adding where the ear and taste cannot be satisfied." (*Art, Literature and the Drama*, p. 356). A very difficult task always in translating is to find idioms in the language into which a work is to be translated that correspond in meaning and force to those of the original. When it is required in addition to keep the external form of the work intact, as in poetry, it is easy to understand why poetical translations are rarely successful except when done by another poet. Margaret Fuller, as is evident from her original verse, was not a poetess. She never made any pretensions in this direction, though she often set her thoughts down in verse. Many of these are hasty translations from the German, made for friends who had no knowledge of this language, and with whom she wished to share some of the enjoyment which she herself found in the poems translated. Her translation of *Tasso* may have been partly from the same motives—namely, that a larger circle might enjoy the same, not that she expected to produce a work of art—; for she writes after her apology for not doing the translation better: that though only a "hollow-sounding reed" is substituted for the "many-toned lyre on which the poet originally melodized his inspired conceptions," she believed "no setting could

utterly mar the lustre of such a gem," or make the translation of this "perfect work of art unwelcome to the meditative few, or even to the tasteful many." (*Art, Literature and the Drama*, p. 356).

Margaret Fuller was preëminently a literary critic, and as such she ranked among the best that our country ever produced. She was able to recognize a good piece of literature at first sight, sound its depth and meaning and reach an independent conclusion, which seldom needed revision. Much of her published verse, as T. W. Higginson has said, was never meant, or at least never prepared for publication. The latter was partly true of her translation of *Tasso*. There is no doubt that had she lived and published it herself she would have given it a final thorough revision and carefully smoothed out many of the rough places, just as she revised the few of her original verses which she printed now and then during her life-time.

FREDERICK A. BRAUN.

Princeton University.